

**Washington State Auditor's Office**  
**Whistleblower Report**

---

**Department of Social and Health  
Services**

**Report No. 1003637**

**Issue Date**  
**May 17, 2010**



WASHINGTON  
**BRIAN SONNTAG**  
STATE AUDITOR



**Washington State Auditor  
Brian Sonntag**

May 17, 2010

Department of Social and Health Services  
Olympia, Washington

***Report on Whistleblower Investigation***

Attached is the official report on Whistleblower Case No. WB 09-043 for the Department of Social and Health Services.

The State Auditor's Office received an assertion of improper governmental activity at the Agency. This assertion was submitted to us under the provisions of Chapter 42.40 of the Revised Code of Washington, the Whistleblower Act. We have investigated the assertion independently and objectively through interviews and by reviewing relevant documents. This report contains the results of our investigation.

Questions about this report should be directed to Senior Investigator Sandy Miller at (360) 902-0378 or Director of Special Investigations Jim Brittain at (360) 902-0372.

Sincerely,

**BRIAN SONNTAG, CGFM**  
WASHINGTON STATE AUDITOR

BS:sym

cc: Jacob White, Public Disclosure and Ethics Administrator

# Investigation Summary

## State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services

### ***ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION***

We received an assertion on February 3, 2009, that a Department employee gave preferential treatment to a Department client with whom she had a personal relationship.

### ***ASSERTION AND RESULTS***

**A Department of Social and Health Services employee is giving preferential treatment to clients with whom she has personal relationships.**

We found no reasonable cause to believe an improper governmental action occurred.

We reviewed all documentation pertaining to two clients the subject was asserted to have friendships with outside of work and interviewed the subject. She stated one of the clients had come into the Department office seeking assistance and later contacted the subject on her personal cell phone to arrange a time to meet her in the office, but denied a personal relationship with that client.

The case files showed the subject was one of several Department employees involved in determining assistance eligibility for both cases. We found one rent reimbursement payment of \$1,250 the subject approved for the client that lacked adequate supporting documentation. That documentation would have included the landlord's name, the property address and an account statement.

Several Department employees authorized services for these clients and we did not find documentation to indicate either client benefitted from a personal relationship with the subject. Therefore, we did not find reasonable cause to believe an improper governmental action occurred.

### ***AUDITOR'S REMARKS***

We thank Department officials and personnel for their assistance and cooperation during the investigation.

## ***INVESTIGATION CRITERIA/POLICIES***

We came to our determination in this investigation by evaluating the facts against the criteria below:

RCW 42.52.070 Special privileges.

Except as required to perform duties within the scope of employment, no state officer or state employee may use his or her position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself or herself, or his or her spouse, child, parents, or other persons.

## Contacts

### Washington State Auditor

Brian Sonntag, CGFM [brian.sonntag@sao.wa.gov](mailto:brian.sonntag@sao.wa.gov) (360) 902-0360

### Director of Special Investigations

Jim Brittain, CPA [jim.brittain@sao.wa.gov](mailto:jim.brittain@sao.wa.gov) (360) 902-0372

### Deputy Director of Special Investigations

Kim Hurley, CPA [kim.hurley@sao.wa.gov](mailto:kim.hurley@sao.wa.gov) (360) 725-5352

### Special Investigations Coordinator

Julie Cooper [julie.cooper@sao.wa.gov](mailto:julie.cooper@sao.wa.gov) (360) 902-0377

### Investigators

Sandra Miller [sandra.miller@sao.wa.gov](mailto:sandra.miller@sao.wa.gov) (360) 902-0378

Cheri Elliott [cheri.elliott@sao.wa.gov](mailto:cheri.elliott@sao.wa.gov) (360) 725-5358

### Director of Communications

Mindy Chambers [mindy.chambers@sao.wa.gov](mailto:mindy.chambers@sao.wa.gov) (360) 902-0091

### Public Records Officer

Mary Leider [mary.leider@sao.wa.gov](mailto:mary.leider@sao.wa.gov) (360) 725-5617

Main phone number (360) 902-0370

Toll-free hotline for reporting government waste, efficiency (866) 902-3900

Web site [www.sao.wa.gov](http://www.sao.wa.gov)

To receive electronic notification of audit reports, visit:  
<https://www.sao.wa.gov/EN/News/Subscriptions>

### Americans with Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this document will be made available in alternate formats. Please call (360) 902-0370 for more information.